

Sister Khema's Samaneri (novice) Ordination Dhamma Talk

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Man has always asked certain questions:

Where did I come from?
Why am I here?
Where am I going?

We humans are always searching for these answers. Indeed this is our spiritual search while passing through this existence.

The Buddha searched for these answers too and he came up with a meditation practice that led to clear answers about how mind actually works and the true nature of everything.

This place, Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center and Anathapindika's Park, is where people come to study what he figured out. This place gives a person the chance to do the same experiment for themselves with a support system in place consisting of food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

The Buddha knew that

- Seeing for yourself is the only way for you to find the answers about these things.

It's not easy- You must be Committed to the goal, Practicing all the time, Ardent, Resolute, but Smiling— having Fun too.

Here is how the Buddha is different.

- He claimed to find a DIRECT PATH to the answers IF the instructions he gave were followed to the letter.
- He was a Rebel in his own time, an activist.
- He used a different teaching method- Set up a different relationship between teacher and student where the teacher was a Guide and the Student was challenged to use personal experience to see what was true and what was not.
- He had already seen what he was talking about and so he was a "man" who was a GUIDING TEACHER
- He taught for 45 yrs to produce more GUIDING TEACHERS to teach others the same direct route.
- He discovered that seeing for oneself in the ONLY way to experience the change in perspective and personality it takes to live in continuous Peace and Harmony without disturbance of mind.

What was different about the Buddha was that he was Not a God...He was a man who had reached his super-normal potential and could see clearly the True nature of everything.

He taught that anyone could achieve the same understanding AND that it would lead to an end of suffering and to a Peaceful and Happy life.

The basic approach for practice was--

If it leads to happiness and contentment and a clear mind in your life without any barriers coming up to block the way, then do it again! If it doesn't then don't do that anymore.

The Buddha taught a clear understanding of the Past, the Present, and the Future. He taught us how to make life simpler by operating in the PRESENT MOMENT and handling one thing at a time. He showed us how to use our full potential in this moment to become really alive and how it can be fun to change old unwholesome habits into wholesome ones.

What the Buddha gave us as a guidance system for this was what is now called the 4 Noble Truths and all of the present day traditions teach these four truths in one form or another.

1. There is Suffering
2. There is a Cause of suffering.
3. There is a Cessation of suffering.
4. There is a Way or a Path to the Cessation of suffering.

You can know what suffering is, and know how to recognize it when it arises, and realize what cessation feels like through learning the meditation practice. But none of this will change a thing in your life unless you know the way to reach this state called "cessation" during your life.

The most important part of the teaching is, therefore, the path to the Cessation of Suffering.

The Buddha taught this path in 8 parts.

They are Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The Buddha was first and foremost a meditator and so whenever he taught anyone it can very logically be assumed that he would present things in relationship to the meditation practice. The practice had been his vehicle to get to the truth of things and he was attempting to teach others how to do the same thing for themselves.

It is also been said that the Buddha taught a gradual teaching. Therefore, it is only logical that there was a gradual learning that took place. Having said this, one finds many levels of this path during training, depending on how much one is practicing the meditation and how much usable knowledge one has attained.

On a surface or gross level the layman can find within the 8 parts a simple guidance for life in general. But for one who routinely practices the meditation there is another way of looking at the path in relationship to everything. This goes much deeper and leads to a change in personality and perspective all round.

1. Right View
can be achieved by practicing a Harmonious Perspective.

A Harmonious Perspective is a perspective where one lets go taking things personally and stops trying to control everything. Imagine living one day where whatever happened to you and in everything you said, there was no I, ME, MY, or MINE involved. You let go of the idea of controlling things. In the end there would only be an impersonal observation of what was going on. Nothing would be taken personally this way. Arguments would eventually cease. Letting go of desire or aversion; like or dislike of things would change into peaceful co-existence.

Anytime one tries to change the way things are, one finds only a struggle with tension, stress and illness both the mental and physical kind. By recognizing the arising of this tension and tightness and

releasing it, letting it be, one can become free from suffering. Within our meditation we are learn to recognize this tension at earlier and earlier times and release it so that we can see how the cessation of it actually feels. As we learn about this we begin to realize that what is arising is actually an impersonal process that happens in the same way each time.

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2. Right Thought can be achieved by practicing Harmonious Imaging.

This step is the part of mind that works in images. The images can be thoughts, feelings, or pictures. When practicing Loving Kindness Meditation one brings up a feeling of happiness, joy, calmness and feels that image. This would be a conscious replacing of unwholesome imaging such as fear, anxiety, depression or sadness that is currently present. One substitutes the wholesome image replacing the unwholesome image and finds themselves feeling that wholesome uplifting image.

Actually this is replacing a bad habit with a new wholesome habitual pattern. This is a skill one can train to do. As you Recognize the unwholesome and Release it, relaxing any tension that is left over, you can smile and uplift the mind to see things as they are more clearly. You can bring up the new image to replace the old on and then feel lighter and better as you go along.

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3. Right Speech can be practiced as Harmonious Communication.

This communication is not just with speech. The communication is with our bodies, speech and mind and not only to others but to ourselves. If we do not love ourselves, we cannot love others or teach others about love. So learning to forgive ourselves first, before anything else and to be kind to ourselves is very important. Each time we let go of an arising tension and tightness and smile and lighten up we are being kind to ourselves and to our bodies and minds.

This can become a game where you keep track of how often you remember to Release, Relax, Smile, and then continue on with Loving Kindness again. If you smile you will feel the lighter mind that immediately happens and how much sharper your awareness of these things happens to become. Also if you are involved with trying to control things, by clinging to the idea of “I” like it this way, or “I” don’t like it that way, you will find yourself out of sync with other people very fast too. Really what this is about is learning to lovingly accept whatever arises in the present moment and communicating this acceptance to ourselves and others. You could say that this is about practicing loving the person we are with and always speaking with that love. This makes for more peace in this world.

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4. Right Action can be practiced as development of Harmonious Movement.

When we are meditating we are learning to become observers. Seeing the movements of HOW mind’s attention goes from one thing to another is what meditation is all about! As you train your observation powers you can begin to actually see clearly how mind’s attention goes from being on the breath and relaxing to a sound, sight, smell, taste, touch or thought. This is seeing a process in action of HOW mind’s attention moves, step by step, that turns out to be impersonal in nature. The more interest one puts on watching this the more precise one’s understanding becomes. This practice is especially helpful in letting go and relaxing when one of the hindrances arise.

The Hindrances are barriers to progress in the practice, but they are feelings like any other feelings that arise and can be released in the same way. Wanting something to be one way, or wanting it to not be a certain way; becoming restless or just losing our energy in our observation are hindrances that can slow us down. But we can let these go and bring up wholesome interest and then go on. Practicing this observation of the movements of mind’s attention all the time during our day, beginning to notice

HOW all of this works is our ALL THE TIME MEDITATION and this can become fascinating to observe.

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5. Right Livelihood
can be practiced as Harmonious Lifestyle.

The Buddha gave these instructions to the ascetics that were practicing with him over the 6 years. They were all meditators. He was attempting to show them his direct experience through his meditation practice. So it is logical to assume that this part is about carrying the observation method of the meditation practice with us all the time. If we begin to do this, we will continue to purify our minds as we go along. Gradually we will be able to catch arising emotional states and let them go, resting in more balanced states.

One learns to carry the entire 8-Fold Path with us. Having a Harmonious Lifestyle means that we carry the meditation which actually is Harmonious Observation, Harmonious Communication, Harmonious Imaging, Harmonious Perspective, Harmonious Collectedness and Harmonious Movement with us all the time. In this way one learns to understand that the impersonal process of HOW things work, which the Buddha called the Process of Dependent Origination works. In this way we are practicing to realize that Meditation is Life; Life is Meditation.

In general in life people will notice that we are becoming more careful and aware of all wholesome things and that happiness is beginning to arise in our lives.

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6. Right Effort
can be performed as Harmonious Practice.

As one progresses one begins to see why this meditation is called a PRACTICE and why it was a DIRECT PATH TO CESSATION. By now we are noticing how it works.

This practice of meditation can be broken down to a system our teacher has brought into modern terminology for us so we can remember to keep it going all the time. It's called the 6R's. The 6 R's consist of

1. RECOGNIZE
2. RELEASE
3. RELAX
4. RE-SMILE
5. RETURN
6. REPEAT

In short they mean to remember to:

RECOGNIZE that mind's attention has become distracted away from the object of meditation;

RELEASE or let go of, or let the distraction be without keeping mind's attention on it;

RELAX the tightness and tension caused by that distraction, this means to let go of the craving caused by that distraction;

RE-SMILE to lighten the mind and sharpen awareness;

RETURN- mind's joyful attention back to the meditation object, (the breath or sending the Loving Kindness and relaxing);

REPEAT- the observation process and continue to watch. The smiling helps to keep mind uplifted.

The process has six parts in the beginning. They become three and then one fluid motion that is continuously going on. This is like the movement of the flapping of a bird's wing in flight. One does not see the many movements that go on in flight. It appears as a fluid motion.

In general in life, the practice becomes life and everything becomes more balanced and clear as you go along.

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7. Right Mindfulness

can be practiced as Harmonious Observation.

Following this practice of meditation there is no mystery anymore about the definition of Mindfulness. Mindfulness now means: to remember to recognize and release any distraction that pulls mind's attention away from the object of meditation.

Further, it means to remember to observe whatever arises in the present moment, let it be and see the impersonal nature in all of these phenomena (which ins the Harmonious Perspective) . Remembering to let go (Harmonious Practice).

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8.Right Concentration

can be practiced as Harmonious Collectedness.

Harmonious Collectedness best describes the mind used for success in the meditation. It means entering the meditation practice by bringing together a unified mind, collected in a balanced way which is a specific kind and level of concentration that is not harsh in any way.

It is not like concentrating hard to do something like learning to ride a bike. It is more like a young child with curiosity and an intense interest to see what happens next or to just see what is around the corner when peeking at the edge of it! That is the innocent, light mind needed to move through the deepest states of observation during the practice of the meditation.

These deep states are called "jhanas" which simply mean "levels of understanding". There are 4 jhanas which often are broken down into 8 for remembering more easily. They are composed of material states and then immaterial states. The more still the mind becomes as the interest and observation deepens and the skill of awareness sharpens, the more one learns HOW things actually are.

Colors become clearer. Sounds become sharper. Odors are more easily detected. Tastes are more exact. Touch becomes more precise. Without the disturbance of imagination and conceptualizing what is going on, one comes to lovingly accept most present moments exactly as they are without mind becoming disturbed anymore. This is seeing the world and everything in it for exactly what it is. As it is. Nothing more.

As a result, tension dies. Stress no longer arises. Blood pressure often goes down. The body feels better and Diseases fade away. Joy arises and hangs around more often and smiles arise more easily when realizing finally what is the true nature of everything. One feels a immense amount of relief.

The practice leads us to the answers the Buddha asked in the beginning of our discussion. It tells us we come around through rebirth until, as humans, we realize how to see things as they actually are.

WE do this by coming to fully understand the 4 Noble Truths and using the meditation to investigate following their instructive pattern. In this way we get to actually see clearly for ourselves the Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination. This gives us the answers to everything we need to free ourselves.

What we are doing is Seeing suffering as it just begins. One can see the Cause clearly, then releasing the cause, one experiences for themselves the reality of the state of Cessation. This confirms fully that this state was not a myth or a theory but a real and reachable state of being. By following the instructions of the Buddha precisely, not adding or subtracting anything, we see the genius of the DIRECT PATH to the end of suffering. One discovers for oneself that this path can still be done in this very lifetime. With this realization, Confidence and Zeal arises and we become determined to go on.

In this new JOY and the following of Tranquility we find a true contentment and Happiness.

Each person's success is directly proportional to how well they can follow these instructions and hold to them as they go along.

This is what we do here at this center. Our goal is simply to listen to the suttas in a traditional way, practice their instructions, study the suttas to preserve and teach them to others. This is our practice. This is what the Buddha did. In joining the Sangha one then continues to give this to others and to guide them towards this knowledge and vision and freedom.

Idealistically too, if more people were RESPONDING in this world based on what is real rather than acting on assumptions and conceptualizations it is clear that the world would be a better place to live in. Perhaps this path can still become a path that could lead mankind towards a transcendence to Peaceful Co-existence. I think you will agree that it would be good for the human race to consider such an idea.

I hope while you are here you will take a little time to walk around and see how far we have come with our project.. Don't be afraid to put your noses inside of the different places we have built so far to take a look. Don't wait too long to come back here and try the meditation. As the Buddha told one of his chief followers: "Don't wait Ananda! There are these trees and these empty huts. Meditate Ananda in this life now or you will regret it. Meditate."

Now as is a traditional Buddhist custom we will share the merit of this day with you all and all beings.

May suffering Ones be suffering Free.
May the fear-struck Fearless be.
May the Grieving shed all Grief.
May all beings find Relief.

May all beings share this merit
Which we have thus acquired
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness,
May all beings inhabiting space and earth
Devas and Nagas of mighty Power
Share this merit of ours.
May they long protect

The Buddha's Dispensation.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!